

Satellite helps police nab suspect

By JOHN K. WILEY
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SPOKANE, Wash. — When Brad Jackson and his 9-year-old daughter disappeared without a sound from his front yard early one school morning, police were skeptical.

Blood stains on Jackson's size-11 athletic shoes and Valariee's sheets added to their suspicions. And Valariee's mother, Roseann Stone Pleasant, had disappeared just as mysteriously in 1992.

So when the trail grew cold, investigators turned to the digital-age version of a bloodhound, a space-based tracking system that made the 23-year-old truck driver unwittingly lead them to clues.

A week after Valariee's Oct. 18 disappearance, detectives obtained warrants to search Jackson's white-and-brown 1995 Ford pickup. The vehicle was soon returned — but with hidden cargo.

Police had attached Global Positioning System devices — satellite-linked transmitters commonly used by boaters, hikers and the military for navigation — that allowed them to track Jackson's movements for the next 15 days.



JACKSON

By removing the GPS devices and following the paths they traced, detectives found two grave sites — an empty one about 10 miles from the family home and another, about 50 miles northwest of Spokane near Springdale, where they found the child's body.

Police believe the girl's body was buried at a Spokane Valley grave, then later dug up and reburied at the more remote site.

And last week, using information developed in part during the GPS-aided surveillance, police on Tuesday charged Jackson with second-degree murder. Jackson, held on \$1 million bond, was under a suicide watch in the Spokane County Jail.

It was believed to be the first time the Spokane County Sheriff's Department had used such equipment in a criminal investigation, though federal authorities have used such devices for years. Hoping to use the technology in the future, sheriff's officials were reticent to discuss details but were obviously pleased with the outcome.

"Our whole purpose was to use everything in our capability to determine the whereabouts of Valariee Jackson," Lt. Doug Silver said.

GPS devices receive signals from three or more satellites to pinpoint a position using the Earth's latitude and longitude. Accurate to within 10 meters, infor-

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SAD FAREWELL — Mourners gather for a memorial service for Valariee Brianne Jackson at the Valley Fourth Memorial Church in Spokane, Wash. When Brad Jackson said his 9-year-old daughter had disappeared from his front yard, police were skeptical and turned to a high-tech tracking system.

SATELLITE: Lawyer questions use of GPS

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mation logged by the devices can be downloaded into a personal computer and overlaid on a map.

In the Jackson case, police were able to determine exactly how long Jackson was at each grave site. They knew he went to the Stevens County site on Oct. 6. Four days later, Jackson's truck was tracked to the Spokane Valley site, then to the Stevens County site where Valariee's body was exhumed Oct. 13.

Co-workers at the steel fabrication company where Jackson worked as a truck driver described

him as a devoted father and a hard worker who was often accompanied by his daughter when he picked up his paychecks.

Detectives have not publicly provided a motive for the girl's killing, but prosecutors say sexual abuse may have played a role.

Meanwhile, Spokane police have reopened their investigation into her mother's disappearance.

Jackson's lawyer, Dave Hearneen, said use of the GPS raises some constitutional questions.

"There has to be some checks and balances with a device like

that," he said. "What is the next step? How far is law enforcement allowed to go," he said. "It's pretty scary."

But Larry Erickson, executive director of the Washington State Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs, said GPS is just another law enforcement tool.

"I don't think you'll ever get to point where sheer leather and a good detective or patrolman's knowledge are replaced. But certainly, it gives you some real advantages to bring a person who's committed a crime to adjudication," he said.